

Ayer Building (later McClurg
Building & Crown Building)
218 South Wabash Avenue
Chicago
Cook County
Illinois

HABS No. ILL-1025

HABS
ILL,
16-CHIG,
27-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Washington Planning and Service Center
National Park Service
1730 North Lynn Street
Arlington, Virginia

AYER BUILDING
(Later MC CLURG BUILDING and CROWN BUILDING)

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Location: 218 South Wabash Avenue, Chicago, Cook County Illinois.

Present Occupant: Wurlitzer Company on ground floor, various tenants in offices on upper floors.

Present Use: Business building.

Statement of Significance: This is a typical office building by the architects Holabird and Roche, with a particularly fine facade. Designated a Chicago Architectural Landmark in 1958.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: The chain of title for this property, recorded in Book 461, pp. 153-154, 172, Cook County Recorder's Office, does not seem to be complete.

The building was erected for Frederick Ayer (original drawings), and it apparently remained the property of him and his successors until 1926 when it passed to Mc Clurg Building Corporation (document 9422766) which may already have had a partial interest in the building. The building was known in 1949 as the Crown building (Randall).

2. Date of erection: 1900.
3. Architect: Holabird and Roche.
4. Notes on original construction: The cost of the building, including architect's fees, was 13.68 cents per cubic foot.
5. Notes on alterations: The original terra cotta cornice, an enriched projecting cornice, has been removed. The interiors have been completely remodeled for later uses.

B. Sources of Information:

Original drawings for the Ayer Building, 215-221 Wabash Avenue, Holabird and Roche, Architects, on microfilm, roll 19, frames 159-207 in the Burnham Library, Art Institute of Chicago.

Randall, Frank A. History of the Development of Building Construction in Chicago. Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1949. p. 149.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This is a typical office building of the period, with a particularly fine terra cotta facade, simple and well proportioned.
2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: 80'-5" wide (three-bay front) x 160' deep. Nine stories plus one basement.
2. Layout--shape: Rectangular.
3. Foundations: Pile foundations with caissons under south party wall.
4. Wall construction: White glazed terra cotta facade, very open, marked off in simple rectangular panels with engaged, fluted cylinders or columns used horizontally as well as vertically.
5. Structural system, framing: Bearing masonry walls, two rows of interior columns spaced 17'5-1/4" on center.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Not original.
 - b. Windows and shutters: Wide Chicago windows, wide fixed pane with double hung window to either side, single light sash. Simple double hung windows on the rear.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Nearly flat roof.
- b. Cornice, eaves: Removed. Originally a projecting, enriched cornice of terra cotta.

C. Description of Interiors:

Floor plans: Planned with open, undivided interiors. Public lobby with stairway and elevators at the northeast (front, right) corner. The interiors have been completely remodeled.

D. Site:

The building faces east on a business street in the loop district of Chicago. Party walls and adjoining buildings of a similar size on both sides, alley to the rear.

Prepared by Dr. Osmund R. Overby, Architect
National Park Service
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